



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**EQUALISING PRIMARY FOOD
CONSUMPTION IN INDIA**

www.nextias.com

EQUALISING PRIMARY FOOD CONSUMPTION IN INDIA

Context

- India's journey from food scarcity to self-sufficiency has been remarkable; however, millions still face hunger, and even more suffer from inadequate nutrition.

About Primary Food Consumption in India

- According to the **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023–24** by the **National Sample Survey (NSS) Office**:
 - Rural households** spent 47.04% on food items, while **urban households** allocated 39.68% to food.
 - Non-food expenditure** accounted for **52.96% in rural areas** and **60.32% in urban areas**.
- The **World Bank's 'Poverty and Equity Brief: INDIA', 2025** suggests that **extreme poverty (living on less than \$2.15 per day)** fell from 16.2% in 2011-12 to 2.3% in 2022-23.

Major Poverty Committees in India Based On Consumption

- Alagh Committee (1979):** First official attempt to define poverty lines for rural and urban India. It is based on minimum calorie intake — 2,400 kcal/day for rural and 2,100 kcal/day for urban areas.
- Lakdawala Committee (1993):** Used **consumption expenditure data** from NSSO surveys.
- Tendulkar Committee (2005–2009):** Moved away from calorie norms to a broader consumption basket.
 - Include health and education in poverty estimation.
 - Use **Mixed Reference Period (MRP)** for data collection.
- Rangarajan Committee (2012–2014):** Reassess poverty measurement amid criticism of Tendulkar methodology.
 - Raise poverty thresholds: 32/day for urban and 27/day for rural (2014 prices).
 - Include food, clothing, rent, transport, education, and health in the poverty basket.
 - Suggested tracking the bottom 30% of the population for policy targeting.

Beyond Calories: 'Thali Meal' Approach

- Conventional method:** Poverty in India has **historically been measured** by the income required to meet minimum calorie needs.
 - It does not capture the broader aspects of nutrition and food satisfaction, while this physiological approach has merit.
- Thali as a Metric:** The **thali meal**, comprising **rice, dal, vegetables, roti, curd, and salad**, represents a balanced and culturally relevant unit of **food consumption in South Asia**.
 - Using CRISIL's **estimate of ₹30 per home-cooked thali**, researchers have calculated affordability levels based on actual food expenditure data.
- Findings (2023–24):**
 - 50% of rural households** and **20% of urban households** could not afford two thalis a day.
 - Even after accounting for **Public Distribution System (PDS) supplies**, deprivation remained high: **40% in rural areas** and **10% in urban areas**.
- It suggests that **food deprivation** persists at much higher levels than **World Bank poverty figures indicate**.

Related Concerns & Issues

- PDS Effectiveness:** Cereals constitute only about **10% of household expenditure**, limiting the system's effectiveness in tackling broader nutritional deficits.
- Subsidy Distribution:** In rural India, the top 10% still receive almost the same subsidy as the bottom 5%, despite having triple the expenditure capacity.

- ♦ In urban India, while the subsidy regime is more progressive, around **80% of households** still benefit, including those well above basic nutritional needs.
- **Unequal Protein Consumption:** The consumption of **pulses**, unlike cereals, the main source of protein for many Indians — is **highly unequal**.
 - ♦ The poorest consume **half the pulses** compared to the richest.

Efforts & Initiatives

- **Public Distribution System:** It provides **subsidised cereals and free food**, and has **equalised cereal consumption** across income groups.
 - ♦ Even the richest consume roughly the same amount of rice and wheat as the poorest.
- **Urban Poverty Alleviation (2024 Pilot Mission):** It builds on the success of DAY-NULM, which mobilized over 1 crore urban poor households into **Self-Help Groups**, with 90% women participation. It targets urban poverty with five components:
 - ♦ Community-led Institution Development;
 - ♦ Financial Inclusion & Enterprise Development;
 - ♦ Social Infrastructure;
 - ♦ Convergence with other ministries;
 - ♦ Innovative Projects for vulnerable groups (e.g., gig workers, domestic workers)
- The **Comprehensive Nutrition Report** highlights that improving iron intake and diversifying sources is essential to combat anaemia among women and children.

Other Efforts Supporting Primary Food Consumption

- **National Food Security Act (NFSA):** Legally entitles up to 75% of rural and 50% of urban populations to subsidized food grains.
 - ♦ Covers 81 crore beneficiaries, including 16 crore women, under:
 - Priority Households (PHH)
 - Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)
- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):** Launched during COVID-19 to provide free food grains to the poor.
 - ♦ Extended for five more years from January 2024.
 - ♦ Benefits 81.35 crore people, ensuring food access during economic disruptions.
- **PM POSHAN (formerly Mid-Day Meal Scheme):** Targets nutritional improvement in school children.
 - ♦ Covers government and aided schools.
 - ♦ Promotes regular school attendance and better learning outcomes.
- **Fortified Rice Distribution:** Enhances rice with essential vitamins and minerals.
 - ♦ Over 406 lakh metric tonnes distributed via PDS since 2019–20.
 - ♦ Aims to combat hidden hunger and micronutrient deficiencies.

Policy Recommendations

- **Restructure PDS subsidies:** Increase support for the poorest households.
 - ♦ Eliminate subsidies for households already consuming more than two thalis a day.
- **Reallocate resources:** Rationalise excessive cereal entitlements.
 - ♦ Redirect savings toward subsidising pulses.
- **Make PDS compact and effective:** Avoid blanket coverage that spreads resources thin.
 - ♦ Target support to equalise primary food consumption across the population.

Source: TH

Daily Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the significance of equalising primary food consumption in India in the context of nutritional equity, regional disparities, and government policy interventions.